



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

I allude, first, to the revelations made by the Blessed Virgin herself to St. Brigit, which you will find recorded in a large folio Latin volume, entitled the "Revelations of St. Brigid," with notes by Consalvus Durantus, printed at Cologne in 1628, and which Cardinal Bellarmine has referred to in the 4th vol. of his celebrated Controversies.

In the 1st book of these Revelations, cap. ix., p. 11, you will find that the Blessed Virgin expressly revealed it to St. Brigit that her parents "convenerunt earne contra voluntatem suam ex divina dilectione;" and in the 6th book, cap. 49, p. 392, further revealed to her in express terms, "Ego conceputa fui sine peccato originali et non in peccato." Surely, Mr. Editor, if these revelations were true, they ought to decide the question at once in the affirmative; and there ought to be no doubt whatever on the matter.

The second proof to which I would refer is an equally decisive one, which you will find in Wadding's "Annales Minorum," printed at Rome in 1733, vol. 6, p. 52. It is to this effect: that in the year 1301, when the celebrated John Duns Scotus disputed on the subject before the University of Paris, with such eloquence that he obtained the title of the "Most Subtle Doctor," and induced that learned body to change their opinions on the subject, and make a decree enforcing belief in the newly adopted opinion on all their members, a marble statue of the Blessed Virgin (when he was proceeding to the place of the disputation, and uttered a short prayer beseeching its aid) repeatedly nodded its head in approbation of Scotus's doctrine, to signify that supernatural assistance would not be wanting to him, which mode of confirmation of the doctrine was continued by the image moving its head even to the present day, viz., 400 years afterwards. I add the exact words of the original, to remove all doubt.*

Surely, Mr. Editor, such miraculous testimonies as these, if they can be relied on, ought to settle the question beyond dispute, and relieve both the Pope and Dr. Cullen from all further difficulty. I should be glad, at least, to know what you think of the matter.

Yours, dear sir, very truly,

A PROTESTANT LOVER OF TRUTH.

[We think, with our correspondent that, if such supernatural testimonies as these could be relied on, they ought to settle the question of the Immaculate Conception beyond dispute; but we happen to be able to show somewhat satisfactorily that neither the one nor the other can be safely depended on.

As to the revelations of St. Brigit we refer our correspondent to our article on Rival Revelations, page 15 of our present number, in which we think we have said enough to prevent such revelations from being very confidently relied on in future.

As to the miraculous nodding statue, we can only say, that we think we have very good authority for holding the whole story of the conversion of the University of Paris, by Duns Scotus, in 1304 (though stated by some respectable church historians), to be a mere fable; in proof of which we shall merely refer to Natalis Alexander, who clearly demonstrates the whole account to be erroneous; first, because no author who was contemporary with Scotus makes any mention of it whatever; secondly, there is no account of it among the Gallican historians, or of the Pope who directed it to be held; thirdly, the names of Scotus's opponents are wholly unknown; fourthly, there is no record of it in the Archives of Paris; and lastly, the decree said to have been occasioned by Scotus's persuasive arguments was not made till 1497, one hundred and eighty-nine years after his death.

If Natalis Alexander be right in all this, and he is certainly a writer of a very different stamp from Waddingus, we fear the accompaniment of the nodding marble statue must vanish with the rest of the story, and will not be of much more use in proving the new doctrine than the revelations of St. Brigit, or the spurious passages and panegyrics which Dr. Cullen relied on in the pastoral letter which we ventured to criticise in our last number.]

ST. PATRICK'S WELLS AT STRUEL.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

DEAR SIR.—About a mile from Downpatrick, at a place called Struel (a townland), are situated the famous wells of St. Patrick, so named from the fact, as traditional lore has it, of that holy man having conferred upon them the miraculous properties which for many centuries they have been believed to possess. These wells are four in number, and occupy, at some short distance from each other, the bottom of a valley, which lies at the base of a high and precipitous hill, called Struel Mount. The centre of this valley, for the space of about half an acre, is surrounded by a stone wall, and is called "The Holy Ground." It was once—some eighteen years ago—a pleasant grass plot, but now is cut up into little patches of kitchen gardens. At the northern extremity of it is situated the

drinking well—an ancient circular building, with a doorway for access to the water. This well is used merely for drinking, and has no reputed charm. About the centre of the "holy ground" is the eye well. This is a square building, or vault, with a door-way in one side, where the devotees who seek the cure of some eye-disease kneel and bathe their eyes: the alleged property of this well being the cure of all diseases of the eye, even blindness. The bathing wells, two in number, are at the southern extremity of this enclosure. They differ in no respect as to their miraculous powers, but seem to have enjoyed the distinction that obtains between a plunge and a shower bath—one of them being a regular artificially constructed plunge bath, the other is formed by a rude spout projecting from the wall, about three feet from the ground; here the halt and lame, and the seeker for relief from pains of limb and body, commits his nude corpus to the tender mercies of the aforesaid spout. The plunge bath has been well arranged for immersion. It is approached by a flight of steps, which conduct first to an apartment for undressing; a door from this leads into the bathing-room. A fee was charged for admission here, which made it select; the poorer sort were thus consigned to the "spout." We may add, that the plunge bath has not been used "officially" for several years, and is now occupied as a storehouse for fuel by one of the few Protestants in the hamlet.

Independent of being a noted place for cures of the body, Struel is also honoured with the fame of being profitable for the soul; perhaps in many cases both bodily and spiritual benefit is sought here. But that many come merely for the purpose of doing penance is beyond dispute. The performing of "stations" is done by the devotees walking in single file round the "holy ground," of course encompassing the wells in the circuit. This is called the long station, in contradistinction, we suppose, to certain stations which used to be performed inside the "holy ground" when it was a green, and when the circuit was made round several cairns which have since been levelled. The usual number of gyrations round the enclosure is seven, but it varies. During "the walk" prayers are repeated and beads told; and on coming round to the northern extremity between the drinking well and the ruins of an old chapel, the votaries kneel down and continue saying prayers for a considerable time. These over, they start to their feet again and perform another gyration, and so on till the appointed number is completed. Then the ascension of the Mount takes place. It is done by the devotees climbing this rugged and precipitous ascent on their bare knees. They begin at the base, male and female stripping their knees, and so toiling up to the summit. When they reach St. Patrick's chair (a few large stones placed somewhat in form of an arm chair, and about half way up the Mount) they enter it and make several turns, then proceed on their knee-journey upward. Having reached the summit they rise to their feet, walk down barefooted by a path at some little distance from the line of ascent, and on reaching the bottom return to the starting point, drop on their knees, and repeat the former process as often as their directions have pointed out.

The season for these performances is midsummer eve, and some of the saints' days shortly before and after. But the great occasion is midsummer eve. At 12 o'clock of that night the water is said to overflow; this may have been caused by the number of people paddling about the open channel of the current from the eye-well—this being stopped or obstructed would cause a slight swelling in the stream, which, once it has been raised a very little, will naturally flow over a great portion of the ground, as there is a gentle declivity from it.

In the days of Harris, the author of the history of the County Down (A.D. 1744), this object was effected by means of a sluice which retained or transmitted the water at pleasure. At a subsequent period the sluice was withdrawn, and in its place sods substituted, which interested persons removed with their feet at the usual time; and when the expecting devotees saw the water rising in the wells they attributed the phenomena to St. Patrick. Some years ago a respectable inhabitant of Belfast perforated a part of the embankment and let the water escape in another direction, and this disappointed the expectants of the miracle. The wells, of course, remained dry; and in the succeeding years there were but few visitants, comparatively speaking, to this scene of mingled penitence and sensual enjoyment.

Up to a late period these wells were much resorted to. Some thirty years ago, as we have been credibly informed, there could be seen fifty tents pitched in the surrounding fields, wherein whiskey dealers and cooks of potatoes and herrings reaped a rich harvest in ministering to the bodily wants of those who had come from afar on the spiritual errand of doing stations at the wells of St. Patrick; and it not seldom happened that when the spiritual work of one sort had been gone through, a spiritual exercise of another description was entered upon, when the usual consequences followed, as do with the generality of the votaries of our patron saint. So that it sometimes happened that many went away with more fresh wounds made than old sores healed. In these tents, and in the adjoining fields, under the canopy of a pure sky, they spent the whole night indulging in gratifications of no very holy character; for it was understood that while the jubilee continued, and as long as the multitudes remained on the sacred ground, they could not contract new guilt! *

Of late years, however, the glory of Struel has much declined. It is now evening twilight with the glory of the holy wells. Would that we could say it is the morning dawn of Gospel light that is breaking in and extinguishing the old earthly flame, by the effulgence of the divine fire from heaven. But we believe that, at least in these parts, it is rather the fear of ridicule which keeps many away, than the true and faithful following of that heavenly light which directs to the only "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1). In the neighbourhood of Struel the Roman Catholic population still believe steadfastly in the efficacy of their "holy wells."

I have said that the fame of these wells is declining, but it is not yet gone. It is true the tents have disappeared, and the roads of the district have ceased to be thronged towards midsummer with parties of toil-worn devotees, from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, from towns of England and Scotland. Still, I have been assured by an eye-witness, that last year there were present not fewer than from 300 to 400 of those poor people coming for cures, or to do penance. The writer of this saw, but a few years ago, at least two-thirds of that number present at once, some doing stations, some at the wells, and some climbing the mount. Memory still retains a vivid picture of it. The motley groups, some kneeling in a circle, others in long file, performing the gyrations round the "holy ground;" some gathered round the eye-well, and some bending over its waters; others hard at work, climbing the "face of the rugged mount." The red kerchiefs, tied over the heads of most of the women, gave an eastern aspect to the scene. But then, here and there, the old knee-breeches costume of many of the men, the frieze coat and sun-browned caubeen, brought home our thoughts to our own land, mixing up ideas, howsoever irreverently, of shillelaghs and whiskey. There were present youthful devotees, as well as old; and how the open, innocence-speaking countenances of the young females did contrast with the wizened faces of the old! In young or old, however, the attention was riveted to the work in hand. On, on they went, looking neither to the right nor to the left; and even when a more curious visitor approached closer to the penal path, scarce would a side glance from any evince that they were conscious of aught around them or without them. We may deplore the blindness and the superstition of these poor people; but we must, at the same time, admire the spirit of devotion that actuates them in the discharge of a work that they deem acceptable to God.

In all ages, and in all climes, where the blessed story of the cross is not preached—where the work of the Lord Jesus is not understood—where his precious blood-shedding is not taught and believed to be the alone propitiation, satisfaction, and atonement for sin—men have resorted, and will resort, to the miserable refuge of an accusing conscience—viz., the attempt to propitiate an angry God in whatever way their unaided reason points out. The Hindoo drags his prostrate body along the ground for years, or half-roasts it over some sacred fire to please his God, or at once commits it to the waves of the Ganges, or the wheels of Juggernaut. The Gaelic Druid erected his wicker basket, interwoven with hundred human victims, and committing it to the flames, rejoiced in the holocaust to his God. And those of our poor fellow-countrymen who have not been instructed in the lesson of the cross—who have not heard the good tidings of great joy (Luke ii. 10, 11), that a Saviour was born who saves not only from the punishment of sin (Rom. iii. 5, viii. 1), which the devotees at the wells so vainly attempt to do (Gal. ii. 16), but also saves His people from the dominion of sin (Matt. i. 21), how little will the laceration and wounding of the body prevent a recurrence of those very sins for which they are enduring merely corporeal suffering! We know it has failed in civil punishments, as well as in ecclesiastical. But those who come to Jesus, and receive Him into their hearts by faith, undergo a moral change (how sudden or gradual soever it may be); the love of Christ constrains them to a holy and good life. They cannot sin (i.e., wilfully or habitually), because they will not offend Him (1 John iii. 9). They have come to the cross—they have washed in the fountain of Christ's blood—and for evermore their continual care is to keep God's commandments (John xiv. 15). May their fervent daily prayer be, that He will incline them to keep His laws, and write them in their hearts.—Yours, dear sir, very truly,

R. P.

HOLY WELLS AND PRIESTS GRAVES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

DEAR SIR.—Though in some places in Ireland the belief in holy wells is on the wane, and in not a few confined to old people devoid of education, it is still but too true that the rage for holy wells is in many other localities as great as ever. St. Kevin's Well, near Ahascragh, is still visited by great numbers. St. Patrick's Lough is also the resort of thousands on Patrick's Day, in the expectation of being cured of various maladies. Salterstown, or Psalterstown, near Castlebellingham, is also famous for its holy wells.

Pilgrimages are still in great esteem and regularly made by thousands to the holy wells at St. Mullins, near New Ross, where the belief in divers miraculous cures and other superstitions is deeply implanted in the minds of the peasants. In the parish of Clontuskert, in the

* Wadding's Annales Minorum. Roma, 1733, tom. vi., p. 52, A.D. 1804, cap. xxxv.

"Qui de publico hoc ejus congressu scribunt, illud singulare et mirandum commemorant, quod dum ad disputationis locum procederet (Joannis Duns Scoti) coram obvia B. Virginis statua marmorea brevi oraverit, ejusque operi expostulari, simulacrum vero, inclinato capite, significat supernum ei non defuturum auxilium. Communis ita fuit populi Parisianus traditio, ipsaque imago rem confirmat patenti, et usque ad hodiernum diem, perseverant capitis inclinatione."